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Women with Disabilities who are victims of violence and invisibility

Have you ever heard of violence against women? And Maria da Penha Law? Is the word Femicide familiar to you? But how many times have you read or heard any report, lecture, or discussion specifically on violence against women with disabilities?

Before we talk more about this subject in the next pages, we invite you to answer the Quiz below. Let's go!

QUESTION 1

Do women with disabilities suffer more physical assaults?

- A)** Of course not, because they are seen as fragile people that require care, and no one would have the courage to hurt them
- B)** Yes, because women with disabilities are more vulnerable to abusive and aggressive people

QUESTION 2

In the event of suffering violence, most women with disabilities act as follows:

- A)** Go to police stations and NGOs for women protection or ask for help. Nowadays there is easy access to means of reporting (including social networks), so they can fight for their rights, denounce, and enforce justice
- B)** Remain silent and endure such conditions for a long time, as they have difficulty accessing the means of reporting and, sometimes, depend on third parties or the abuser himself

QUESTION 3

With the isolation situation due to COVID-19 pandemic, has the routine of women with disabilities improved or worsened?

- A)** Improved, since everyone is at home, they do not need to move around in spaces without accessibility and still have more attention and care within their homes
- B)** In cases where caregivers, partners, or those responsible for them, had abusive relationships of violence, it has certainly worsened

If you have answered A on all questions, we are sorry to inform you that we are far from this reality. The correct answers are all B.

CALIANDRA PROJECT – YOUR VOICE, OUR VOICE

– has emerged with the intention of drawing the attention of governments and society regarding prevention, identification, and confrontation of gender-based violence situations, especially against girls and women with disabilities.

How does Caliandra face the current reality? Without violence, of course! But with lots of information and argument, demanding that governments stop omitting and start committing to the problem, after all it is its constitutional obligation to guarantee life, health, and care for all citizens and that includes the provision of professional services for people with disabilities.

Violence against women, regardless of race or financial condition, is a historical fact that has characterized social relations since the existence of men. Male chauvinism is present everywhere, including the previous sentence, where instead of writing “existence of human beings”, our semantics allow us to refer to a whole species by using the male gender. But, if we had written “existence of women”, it would not have the same meaning.

For years women have existed to literally serve men, acting as social assistants. Women were negotiated between families, which made marriage a mere contract. They could not work or vote, let alone choose not to have children. Thus, they had no voice.

However, even in these submissive conditions, many women have made incredible scientific findings, built empires, led discoveries, and conquered territories.

We agree that gender inequality issue has improved a lot lately. But it has not been resolved. Women continue to live in a situation of inferiority at home, where they are often the only ones respon-

sible for the house chores, even when they also work at a different place. We experience a trend in which the number of households headed by women is significant. According to a survey from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (PNAD/IBGE, 2018) of the 71 million homes in Brazil, 55% were headed by men and 45% by women.



The same occurs at work, where in equal roles and even dedicating more hours, women are not seen as deserving of the same position and salary; and in affective relationships, where many men insist on having the last word in decision making, thus choosing submissive women. It is common to witness women of strong personality, occupying high positions, choosing not to get married.

Violence against women has many faces and is even worse against women with disabilities. It is known that thousands of women suffer in silence, day after day, extreme domestic violence. What are the reasons for not defending themselves, cutting off relations with abusers, for not reporting or fighting for justice? Fear, shame, dependence, feeling of inferiority, lack of support and assistance from governments and society. If such feelings haunt all women, imagine women with disabilities, whose dependence and lack of access to laws and information are much greater, while their self-esteem and circle of friends are much smaller.

“The hand that caresses is the same that stones.”

Augusto dos Anjos

Violence or abuse against women with disabilities is, in most cases, committed by their husbands or partners. But they can also be abused by their caregivers, family members and transportation providers, for example. Especially those who need help with basic daily activities, such as bathing, dressing, or eating, are at greater risk of being abused because they are physically or intellectually more vulnerable and can have many different caregivers throughout their lives.

Worldwide, studies reveal frightening facts about violence against women and girls with disabilities. According to the World Bank, they may face up to 10 times more aggression than women and girls without disabilities. The most susceptible to violence are children with autism, hearing, visual, psychosocial, or intellectual impairments, according to the American Psychological Association.

Sometimes girls with disabilities do not even have a birth certificate, which deprives them of access to basic social, health care and education services. They literally do not exist for society and can live in confinement for a lifetime, without access to information or leisure.

The parents' lack of commitment to dedicate themselves to these girls as their daughters and, thus, help in the construction of their personality, character, and project for

the future, often makes them become apathetic to their own existence and simply survive. These girls do not understand their own feelings, as they were not emotionally prepared to understand what is love or aggression, what is to dream or to get disappointed. They often fail to discern the act of third parties as right or wrong, they just submit to the system imposed to them.

Wheelchairs, hearing aids and walking sticks contribute to improving mobility and the desire to leave home in the face of great architectural and urban barriers. People with disabilities are often deprived of their right to come and go. And often, many do not have access to these devices. In addition, people with disabilities of any nature, tend to reduce interaction with other people, increasing the feelings of loneliness, helplessness, and dependence, due to a capacity-based society that is not open to the different.

Despite the stereotyped perception that violence is typically experienced by younger women, existing data confirm that physical and sexual violence can last a woman's life, including later stages. The cumulative experience of violence throughout the life cycle can have a negative effect on the physical and psychological health and well-being of elderly women. Disability is an additional risk factor for violence against women who acquire an age-related condition, such as dementia.

KOISTINEN, Mari; NHLAPO, Charlotte; ARANGO, Diana; GANDINI, Camila. **Five facts to know about violence against women and girls with disabilities.** World Bank, 05 dez.2019. available from <<https://blogs.worldbank.org/sustainable-cities/five-facts-know-about-violence-against-women-and-girls-disabilities> > Accessed: 19 feb.2021



This violence has names and there are many.

Women with disabilities can experience forms of abuse that are difficult to recognize, making it even more difficult to get the help they need. Learning about existing types can help you identify them:

PHYSICAL ABUSE - hitting, slapping and/or physically restraining

SEXUAL ABUSE - forcing to perform sexual acts or preventing women from experiencing their sexuality and sexual rights

VERBAL ABUSE - cursing and yelling

EMOTIONAL ABUSE - isolating from friends and family, humiliating, or ignoring the person

FINANCIAL EXPLOITATION - taking and/or controlling one's money

Some examples:

- **Removing or destroying** mobility devices such as wheelchairs, scooters, walking and hearing aids

- **Denying access** to essential medication.
- Forcing to take medication against one's will, or inducing to take medications outside the prescribed, including dosage increasing to make one inert

- **Forcing to remain** with dirty clothes or diapers, without bathing or teeth brushing.
- Preventing access to food

- **Improperly touching** a person while helping in bath and/or dressing

- **Denying access** to disability related resources in the community and/or to health care, social assistance, education, etc

- **Physically assaulting**, by pinching, hitting, throwing things, dropping, pulling hair, shaking, etc

- **Moral aggression**, with shouting, offensive words, humiliation, ridicule, and contempt.
- Restraining with words and actions that make one feel a hindrance and/or totally rejected

- **Forcing sex** or touching private parts without consent

- **Abandoning**, leaving without care, guard, surveillance or at risk, neglecting basic care

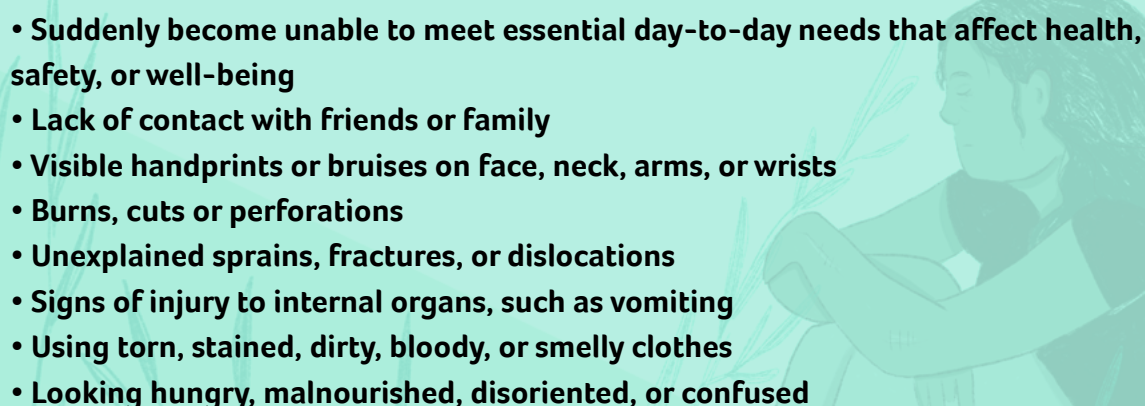
- **Abandoning at specific places** such as hospitals, nursing homes, and related NGOs, believing the person will be safe

What can I do?

In some cases, neglect can occur due to lack of information or imprudence from those responsible and caregivers. Therefore, the first step to cure this sad reality is education. Educating society through campaigns in printed, digital, and audiovisual materials should be a role of the State. But as citizens we can do our part by sharing information on our social networks or by introducing the topic in conversation circles and inviting to debate.

Give a chance and believe what a girl or woman with disabilities says when she narrates situations of violence, even if not in a fully detailed and coherent way.

Now that you have learned the types of abuse, you need to be aware and report to protection services if you notice any of the following cases or signs from a person with disabilities:

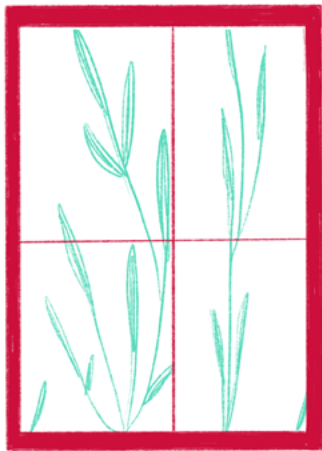
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- **Suddenly become unable to meet essential day-to-day needs that affect health, safety, or well-being**
 - **Lack of contact with friends or family**
 - **Visible handprints or bruises on face, neck, arms, or wrists**
 - **Burns, cuts or perforations**
 - **Unexplained sprains, fractures, or dislocations**
 - **Signs of injury to internal organs, such as vomiting**
 - **Using torn, stained, dirty, bloody, or smelly clothes**
 - **Looking hungry, malnourished, disoriented, or confused**

For a long time, violence against women and girls with disabilities has been an issue surrounded by silence. The time has come to raise awareness and intensify our efforts to create profound and lasting changes for the women and girls who were left behind.

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This material contains alternative text

COVID-19 and social isolation

COVID-19 pandemic haunts the whole world, but for people with disabilities who have compromised health due to problems in the lungs, heart, obesity and diabetes for example, the risk of infection, severe effects and even death are greater, leading the majority to adopt total isolation.

As the only solution found to protect the population of COVID-19 is social distance, people with disabilities have lost their social support network and access to the few care services, as these

places have remained closed most of the time. Their only option was to stay home to try to protect themselves. We say “try to protect” because people with disabilities rarely live alone and often depend on others to help in their daily routine, which compromises effective isolation.

If social distance has compromised the education and development of all children, teenagers, and adults due to lack of services that are not online, imagine the consequences for people with disabilities.

Letícia, 27, is the mother of autistic Carolina, 4 years old. She counted on an NGO that closed due to the pandemic. She chose to continue working and leave the girl with her mother-in-law who had lost her job. Although help from her mother-in-law was essential, Carolina was left without specialized rehabilitation services, aimed at developing her intellectual, motor, and emotional capacities.

Sandra, 52, is a single mother who used to work in a company as receptionist to support herself and her daughter with cerebral palsy, Gabriela, 28 years old. With the pandemic, the NGO that Gabriela attended daily closed and Sandra had to stop working to take care of her. Who could Sandra entrust the care of her daughter, an adult woman with compromised intellectual ability, making sure that she would receive all the aid and not suffer any kind of abuse? One more point for inequality.

COVID-19 caused the achievements of people with disabilities and their families to suffer a huge setback and future forecast is uncertain.

Exploring our main theme: violence against women with disabilities, social isolation raised the rates. In France, for example, studies have already shown an increase of more than 30% in violence against people with disabilities. On the other hand, requests for help and complaints have declined, precisely because several services are unavailable during the pandemic and they are afraid of leaving home and getting infected.

COVID-19 has increased Domestic Violence for several reasons, the main facts follow:



- Social isolation has made people with disabilities depend on caregivers who are often alone with them and end up being overwhelmed, increasing the chances of being aggressive. In addition, relatives unfamiliar with care, had to take on the daily tasks regarding the person with disabilities.

- Abusers of people with disabilities, especially of women with disabilities, have been feeling safer in committing violence, as assistance and regulation services for protection of people with disabilities have decreased, including legal action.

- Both people with disabilities who require care and those responsible for them, started to have more emotional conflicts with isolation, resulting in more stress, discussions, fights, and violence.

These are just a few examples, as little has been said and studied about COVID-19 impact on the lives of people with disabilities. But we know that, if before our problems were only those common to underdeveloped countries, such as lack of education, health, etc., now these inequality situations have intensified and showed themselves. And if people with disabilities were already placed

at the bottom of the list of priorities of government and society, with the pandemic the theme was placed even lower. We hear discussions and planning about the resumption of economy and tourism services, but little about how to treat people with disabilities during and after social isolation.





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Spread the word and Act to ensure access and accessibility!

HEALTH CARE SERVICES

Health care services must become accessible at all its levels of complexity, from Basic Units to High Complexity Hospitals and women care services of sexual and reproductive health. Accessibility includes architectural, urban, transport, communication, programmatic and attitudinal aspects.

Health professionals need to know the signs of violence against people with disabilities and review their capacity-based positions.

The Unified Health System (SUS) is universal, so women with disabilities have the right to be adequately cared for in any situation.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE SERVICES

Social assistance services must also be accessible, mainly CRAS, CREAS, Women Houses and other social protection units.

Social assistance professionals must understand that women with disabilities are also their target audience.

Specialized services of social protection must not repeat old models of specialized philanthropic institutions but focus on general violence situations and gender-based violence against women with disabilities.

PUBLIC SECURITY SERVICES

Public security and justice services also need to have all these characteristics, otherwise they will be practicing social injustice.

Digital systems for reporting crimes of violence against women must be accessible to all.

EDUCATION SYSTEM

Education is an important social protection system for children, particularly for girls with disabilities, so they need to be given priority to remain open during the pandemic.

Teachers need to be prepared to identify signs of violence against girls with disabilities, to know how to refer them properly and specially to give them credit.

The school is responsible, along with the family, for developing knowledge and attitude in girls with disabilities regarding the protection of their bodies.

WE ARE ALL RESPONSIBLE

Exchange between feminist movements of women with and without disabilities.

We are all sisters. Women without disabilities need to acknowledge the specific needs of girls and women with disabilities to consider it in their planning and practice.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Society, including companies, is responsible for developing action plans to prevent and combat gender-based violence against women with disabilities.

Neighbors and close people are responsible for supporting girls and women with disabilities who are victim of gender-based violence.



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Don't be silent, report it!



This material contains alternative text

You can amplify this voice that invites you to fight! Let's go together in a strong claim for equality and justice.

CALL 180 - Call Center for Women

DIAL 100 - National Call Center for Denouncing human rights violations

DIAL 100-3 Option for the Person with Disabilities

Both services available on WhatsApp and Telegram.

Website www.ouvidoria.mdh.gov.br

App "Direitos Humanos Brasil"
(Human Rights Brazil)

Support Network for girls and women

Services are divided into Public Security, Justice, Health Care and Social Assistance. Within each, there are bodies specialized in assisting women in situations of violence and those who are not specialized but can make the necessary referrals.

ON PUBLIC SECURITY:

- Ordinary Police Stations, Women Police Stations and specialized in people with disabilities' rights (in São Paulo and Belo Horizonte)
- Military Police and "Maria da Penha" patrols
- Municipal and "Maria da Penha" guards
- Fire Department
- Legal Medical Institute (IML)

ON THE JUSTICE SYSTEM:

- Ordinary and specialized courts
- Ordinary and specialized prosecutors
- Ordinary defenders and Public Women's Defense Centers



ON HEALTH CARE:

- Health Centers and Units
- Hospitals
- Health services specialized in assisting women in violence situations
- SAMU – Emergency Medical Service

ON SOCIAL ASSISTANCE:

- Shelter Houses
- Shelters for Women in Violence Situations
- Specialized Social Assistance Reference Centers - CREAS
- Social Assistance Reference Centers – CRAS

In addition to these, women can also count on:

- Houses of the Brazilian Woman
- Reference/Specialized Centers for Women

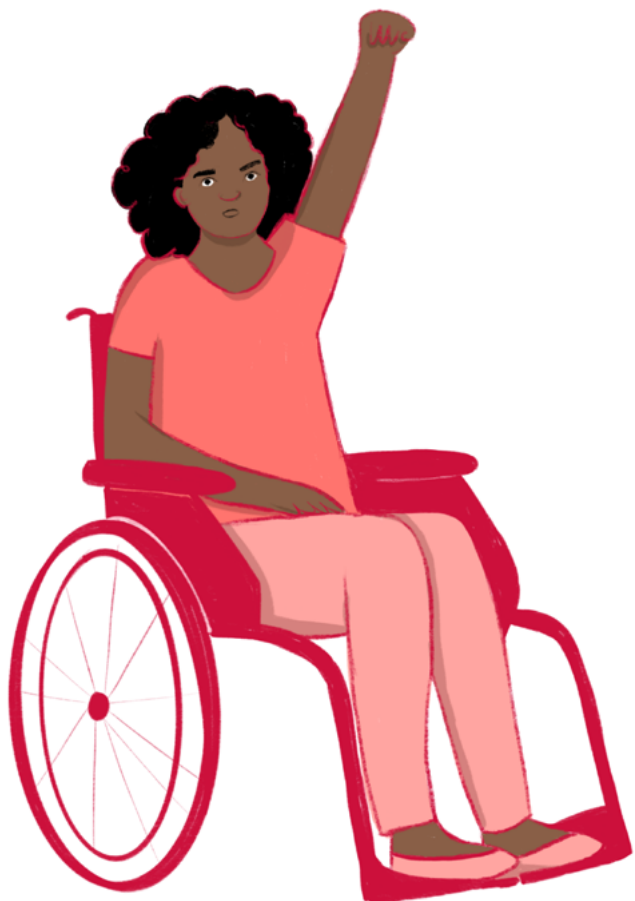
If you would like to talk to us, send an email to caliandra@ame-sp.org.br

We will be delighted to share sorority histories. Our fellowship is a force for building a supportive and inclusive society.

BRASIL. Ministério da Mulher, da Família e dos Direitos Humanos - **Cartilha Enfrentando a Violência Doméstica e Familiar contra a Mulher** [2020]. Available from <<https://www.gov.br/ebserh/pt-br/comunicacao/noticias/ebserh-apoia-acao-do-mfdh-que-visa-combater-violencia-contra-a-mulher/enfrentando-a-violencia-domestica-e-familiar-contra-a-mulher.pdf>>. Accessed: 12 feb.2021

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